

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY DACCA

AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMCONSUL BOMBAY

AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

AMCONSUL MADRAS

USMISSION PEKING

C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 693

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, ETRD, IN, BG

SUBJECT: INDO-BANGLADESH RELATIONS

1. THERE ARE TWO CURRENTS IN INDO-BANGLADESH RELATIONS AT PRESENT. ON THE ONE HAND, WHILE ACKNOWLEDGING THAT THE SITUATION IN BANGLADESH WAS AN INTERNAL MATTER, SENIOR INDIANS SUCH AS MRS. GANDHI AND FORMER DEFENSE MINISTER SWARAN SINGH HAVE TAKEN THE LIBERTY OF CRITICIZING THE BDG BY ALLEGING POLITICAL INSTABILITY THERE AND WARNING AGAINST USE OF BANGLADESH BY OTHERS FOR ANTI-INDIAN ACTIVITIES. THEIR REMARKS HAVE OBVIOUSLY NOT GONE UNNOTICED IN BANGLADESH (DACCA 0152). ON THE OTHER HAND, THE GOI COMPLETED TRADE TALKS WITH A BDG DELEGATION HERE IN DELHI JAN. 12, AND WE UNDERSTAND FROM AN EXPERIENCED JOURNALIST THAT THE BANGALEES WERE EXTENDED A CORDIAL RECEPTION AND THAT THE GOI'S POSITION WAS CONCILIATORY. THIS IS FURTHER INDICATED BY THE STATEMENTS OF THE CHIEF INDIAN

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NEGOTIATOR TO THE PRESS. GOI REPORTEDLY AGREED TO A

REDUCTION IN PRICE OF COAL FOR BANGLADESH IN RETURN FOR A LONG-TERM PURCHASE CONTRACT (DETAILS OF THE AGREEMENT TO BE WORKED OUT WITHIN THE NEXT THREE WEEKS) AND AGREED TO PURCHASE "SUBSTANTIAL" QUANTITIES OF NEWSPRINT FROM BANGLADESH. ACCORDING TO THE JOURNALIST, THE GOI WAS MORE FORTHCOMING IN THE RECENTLY COMPLETED TRADE TALKS THAN IT WAS IN THE DECEMBER 1974 TRADE TALKS WHILE MUJIB WAS IN POWER. THIS IS SIGNIFICANT AS THE VALUE OF THE BANGLADESH TRADE TO INDIA IS NOT SUBSTANTIAL. (SEPTTEL ON TRADE AGREEMENT WILL FOLLOW. THAT THERE ARE THESE TWO SEEMINGLY CONTRADICTORY CURRENTS IN GOI POLICY TOWARD THE BDG PROBABLY DOES NOT CONCERN THE INDIANS, WHO ARE WATCHING DEVELOPMENTS IN BANGLADESH VERY CLOSELY. THE GOI APPARENTLY SEEKS TO KEEP ITS LINES OF COMMUNICATION WITH THE BDG OPEN AS EVIDENCED BY ITS HANDLING OF THE TRADE NEGOTIATIONS. THE COMMENTS OF MRS.GANDHI AND SWARAN SINGH NOTWITHSTANDING, WE UNDERSTAND THAT THE INDIAN PRESS HAS BEEN INSTRUCTED NOT TO DISTURB INDO-BANGLADESH RELATIONS AND WITH ONLY A VERY OCCASIONAL EXCEPTION HAS BEEN STICKING TO THESE GUIDELINES.

2. MEA JOINT SECRETARY AJMANI WAS VAGUE AND GENERAL IN DISCUSSION OF BANGLADESH WITH POL COUNSELOR JAN. 12, FOLLOWING HIS USUAL DICTUM OF NOT SAYING ANYTHING ABOUT BANGLADESH IF HE CANNOT SAY SOMETHING BAD. HE SAID THAT WHILE THERE HAD BEEN A BARRAGE IN PROPAGANDA AND ATMOSPHERICS DIRECTED AGAINST INDIA AND INDIANS, THE SITUATION REMAINED ONE WHICH HAD TO BE WATCHED DAY-TO-DAY, AND WHAT ONE SAID ON MONDAY MIGHT BE UNTRUE ON TUESDAY. THE INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE IN BANGLADESH HAD BEEN DESTROYED AND HAD TO BE REBUILT. PERHAPS SOMETHING WAS BEING DONE TOWARD THIS END, BUT MPJMANI WAS UNPREPARED TO BE FIRM ON THE SUBJECT. NO ELECTIONS COULD BE HELD UNLESS THE AWAMI LEAGUE AND THE COMMUNIST PARTY WERE ENABLED TO BEGIN FUNCTIONING AGAIN, POLITICAL PRISONERS WERE RELEASED, AND THE POLITICALLY CONSCIOUS BANGLADESIS WERE ALLOWED TO BE ACTIVE. HE WAS UNPREPARED TO SAY WHEN THIS MIGHT HAPPEN, OR INDEED WHETHER HE THOUGHT IT WOULD BE A GOOD THING IF IT HAPPENED SOONER RATHER THAN LATER. THE
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SITUATION WITHIN THE ARMY REMAINED PROBLEMATIC AND THERE WERE CONTINUING RUMORS, AJMANI SAID, OF NEW PERSONNEL CHANGES WITHIN THE MILITARY. HAD THE USG HEARD THAT AIR MARSHAL TAWAB WAS OUT OF THE COUNTRY, AND WHAT WAS HE DOING?
3. HE PROFESSED TO BE UNINFORMED ON THE FINAL RESULTS OF THE TRADE TALKS, SINCE THE LAST MEETING HAD TAKEN PLACE ON JAN. 10 WHEN HE WAS OUT OF THE OFFICE. IN GENERAL, HE SAID, THE PROBLEM WAS THAT THE BANGLADESIS HAD NO MONEY AND WERE UNABLE TO PAY FOR

INDIAN GOODS THEY WISHED TO BUY. IF THE INDIANS WERE NOT WILLING TO SUBSIDIZE SOME EXPORTS PRACTICALLY NOTHING WOULD MOVE. NOR WERE THERE MANY THINGS THE INDIANS WANTED TO BUY FROM BANGLADESH. (COMMENT: AJMANI'S VIEW OF THE TRADE TALKS MAY REFLECT MORE OF AJMANI'S DISPOSITION TOWARD THE BJG THAM WHAT TOOK PLACE.)

4. INDIANS AT EVERY OPPORTUNITY HAVE BEEN TELLING VISITORS HERE THAT IT IS SLANDEROUS TO SAY THAT INDIAN TROOPS HAVE BEEN AUGMENTED ALONG THE BANGLADESH BORDER. MRS. GANDHI HAVING MADE THIS POINT TO SENATOR MCGOVERN MOST RECENTLY JAN. 9.

5. IN SHORT, THE SITUATION CONTINUES BECALMED, CAUGHT BETWEEN SOMEWHAT OPPOSING CURRENTS, WITH THE BILATERAL TALKS IN EARLY DECEMBER HAVING APPARENTLY COOLED PUBLICLY EVIDENT TENSION DOWN, BUT WITH LITTLE SIGN OF INCREASED TRUST ON THE PART OF THE GOI TOWARD THE BDG.
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